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Trade Policy Monitoring

Animal Welfare: Scientific Conference evaluates 1-year old EU project

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Report Highlights:

On November 17-18, 2005, a scientific conference was held to evaluate the results of the first year of the EC-funded Welfare Quality project. This €17 million research project was initiated in May of 2004 with funding from the EC DG Research and focuses on the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. This project aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare. Thirty-nine institutes and universities (representing thirteen European countries) with specialist expertise participate in this integrated research project. The goal of the project is to develop a complete tool for EU policymakers to implement animal welfare legislation that covers the whole food chain, including legislation making and standard setting.

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Welfare Quality Conference

On November 17-18, 2005, a scientific conference "**Welfare Quality Conference: Science and society improving animal welfare (1st Stakeholder conference)**", targeted at European and national politicians, retailer, producer and consumer organizations, NGOs and policymakers, was held to evaluate the results of the first year of the Welfare Quality project. This €17 million research project was initiated in May of 2004 with funding from the EC DG Research 6th Framework Program and focuses on the integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain. Thirty-nine institutes and universities (representing thirteen European countries) participate in this project, which aims to accommodate societal concerns and market demands, to develop reliable on-farm monitoring systems, product information systems, and practical species-specific strategies to improve animal welfare.

Topics of the conference were:

- Background of the integrated project Welfare Quality
- Project results and the European Commission's strategic plan for animal welfare
- European consumers' perception of welfare
- The nature of the market for welfare-friendly products in six European countries
- Barriers faced by pig producers in six European countries
- Developing animal based measures to assess animal welfare in cattle, pigs and poultry
- Improving animal welfare by practical species specific measures on the farm
- Tools for implementing the results of the research of Welfare Quality
- The view from politicians, retailers, producers and consumers regarding animal welfare policy, animal welfare monitoring and information systems

More details on the Welfare Quality project and its goals for integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain are available at <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone/26536>.

Highlights of the conference

The project coordinator, **Harry Blokhuis**, opened the conference by elaborating the goals of the Welfare Quality project¹. It can be summarized as the goal to develop a complete tool for policymakers to implement animal welfare legislation that covers the whole food chain, including legislation making and standard setting, animal welfare monitoring on the farm, farm auditing and certification, mandatory labeling of all foods containing animal products – including for imports and information tools for animal awareness development for consumers.

Deputy Director General Health and Consumer Protection (DGSANCO), **Jaana Husu-Kallio**, then announced that DGSANCO would soon elaborate its Action Plan for Animal Welfare (AW). Although she failed to provide details on this plan, she said that it was in its final stages and would probably be proposed to the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFAH) before the end of the year. She said that this was the logical next step of three milestones for animal welfare²:

1) The Treaty of Amsterdam of May 1st, 1999, which set the ground rules for the actions of the European Union (EU) on animal welfare in a special "[Protocol on the Protection and Welfare of Animals](#)". This was renewed in the [Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe](#)

¹ <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone/26559>

² The importance of animal welfare to the EC can hardly be overestimated. The fact that it was included in EU treaties is significant. It means that the EU considers animal welfare to be one of its inherent fields of policy and the EC has to treat animal welfare accordingly.

signed on 29 October 2004 by the Heads of State or Government of the 25 Member States and the 3 candidate countries.

2) The “Five Freedoms³” of animals:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst - access to fresh water and a diet for full health and vigor,
- Freedom from discomfort - an appropriate environment with shelter and comfortable rest area,
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease - prevention or rapid treatment,
- Freedom to express normal behavior - adequate space and facilities, company of the animal's own kind,
- Freedom from fear and distress - conditions and treatment that avoid mental sufferings.

3) The [OIE](#)⁴ guiding principles that resulted from its first global conference on animal welfare⁵, February 23-25, 2004.

Ms. Husu-Kallio explained that in the EC's view it was time to integrate and coordinate animal welfare policies in all EC Directorates General. She said that the results of an [EU-25 EUROBAROMETER survey](#)⁶ had demonstrated consumer's interest in animal welfare and that “producers and retailers were recognizing animal welfare as a fundamental, constituent aspect of product image and quality.” Next steps to be taken were enumerated as follows:

- Improving AW through an “output-oriented approach”⁷
- Ensure consumers make informed purchases through adequate labeling
- Investigate international and WTO/TBT implications. AW has been promoted bilaterally in Veterinary Equivalency Agreements⁸ (VEA) and multilaterally through the OIE.
- Market implications (as AW products are niche markets today)

A range of scientists discussed the problems of setting appropriate parameters for the monitoring of AW on-farm. Main problems were about choosing relevant parameters, making measurements reliable and repeatable, as well as adapting standards to the cultural and climatic throughout EU member states. A consumer representative argued that AW standards needed to be promoted at the retail level. She didn't believe labeling was effective because consumers don't read them and if they do, they may not understand it and misinterpret the label. Industry representatives discussed the need to treat AW as just another technical issue, and not as an optional ethical issue. They regarded AW as a qualitative value component that they were already including in the industry's quality management systems.

DGSANCO Head of Sector for Animal Welfare and Identification **Andrea Gavinelli** was the last speaker of the conference. He elaborated on Welfare Quality in relation to international policies. He pointed at the EU submission to the WTO on AW in 2000 and a 2002 EU survey, which displayed a lack of international consensus on AW, despite a growing trend towards improved AW standards worldwide. Mr. Gavinelli reiterated that the EU was working towards international consensus in the WTO, to multilateral AW standards in the OIE, to multilateral and bilateral agreements i.e. the VEA with Chile, including the labeling of animal products, and supporting further research on the links between animal welfare and animal health. He

³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/farm/index_en.htm

⁴ http://www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm

⁵ http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/international/2003_2073_3l_en.pdf

⁶ http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/euro_barometer25_en.pdf

⁷ Focus is on the farming process, use of on-farm indicators and feedback to producers on shortcomings.

⁸ Already present in the VEA with Chile from 2002 (see GAIN [E35219](#))

recalled the OIE guiding principles for AW of 2004 and the adoption of OIE guidelines for transport and slaughter of animals for human consumption or disease control. During his presentation, Mr. Gavinelli also pointed to a June 2005 report by the Dutch agro-economic think tank LEI called "[Product differentiation under the WTO: An analysis of labeling and tariff or tax measures concerning farm animal welfare](#)."⁹ This report debates the WTO compatibility of EU AW requirements, including on imports, of three different forms for preferential treatment: labeling of products (either voluntary or compulsory), differentiated import tariffs and differentiated consumer taxes.

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⁹ http://www.lei.wageningen-ur.nl/publicaties/PDF/2005/6_xxx/6_05_11.pdf